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ABSTRACT

Using children's books that reflect the cultural heritage of the American Southwest, this paper offers suggestions for integrating the language arts through reading, writing, and listening activities. Activities are arranged into two sections: (1) integrated language arts approaches to writing springing from Southwest picture books by Byrd Baylor, including "The Desert is Theirs," "We Walk in Sandy Places," "When Clay Sings," and "Hawk, I'm Your Brother"; (2) integrated language arts approaches to writing springing from other books on the Southwest, including "The Girl Who Loved Wild Horses" (P. Goble), "The Day It Snowed Tortillas" (J. Hayes), "Annie and the Old One" (M. Miles), and "A New Miguel" (J. Krumgold). (FL)

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# CHILDREN'S LITERATURE OF THE SOUTHWEST:

# CREATIVE SPRINGBOARD TO INTEGRATING THE LANGUAGE ARTS

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CHILDREN'S LITERATURE OF THE SOUTHWEST:

CREATIVE SPRINGBOARDS FOR TEACHING LANGUAGE ARTS

Children's literature can serve as a creative springboard for integrating the language arts while developing an awareness and appreciation for the cultural heritage of the Southwest. Historical events, myths, legends, art, and customs of the peoples often come to life through the experiences of a storybook character or informational book, providing vivid vignettes into Southwestern culture. At the same time such literature, when read aloud, integrates all of the language arts, motivating children to become readers and writers.

Because the findings of the Carnegie Report concluded that writing should be the first priority of the schools, I will stress the teaching of writing through listening, speaking, and reading. Ernest Boyer, director of the three year study, stated that writing is our most needed and most neglected skill, which should be given precedence even over science and mathematics.

In many classrooms writing instruction over the years has been synonymous with assignments focused upon undirected writing of paragraphs, essays or short stories. The ineffectiveness of this approach was demonstrated to me when I asked preservice teachers in a

language arts class at the University of Southern Colorado to write nature poems. The result was frustration for many students. However, after a group writing session modeled after the haikus of Basho, the same students wrote expressive poems with confidence and creativity. As prewriting literary experiences made writing easier for adults, children, too, can benefit from modeling their compositions from good literature.

Perhaps one reason for teachers' neglect of writing instruction is the fact that they were never given much positive direction in their own writing development. Although assigned compositions may have been carefully corrected for mechanical errors along with the teaching of parts of speech and standard usage, research has revealed that neither knowledge of formal grammar nor intensive correction of errors is closely related to the ability to use oral and written language well. Rather, children learn to write by writing and by reading what others have written. Children who write well tend to read more than poor writers. The objective of writing which springs from literature is not to have children imitate the precise style of the author, but to

assimilate more expressive vocabularies, better sentence structure, sense of story structure, and organizational elements modeled from successful writers.

The following guidelines are suggested by Graves (1983) for an integrated language arts approach to writing:

1. Prewriting or rehearsal as children listen to a literary selection for a specific purpose, followed by brainstorming, discussing, and catagorizing.

2. Writing as children cooperatively record their ideas with teacher guidance before individual composing.

3. Rewriting and editing as children read what they have written with the purpose of clarifying, deleting, or reshaping content and correcting mechanical errors.

Integrated language arts approaches to writing springing from books by Byrd Baylor

Suggested Southwest picture books by Byrd Baylor which may be used as springboards for intergrated instruction in the language arts are briefly summarized below along with teaching suggestions:

The Desert is Theirs portrays the Southwest desert as a harsh and lonely, but majestic land "where the Papago Indians speak of the earth as their mother." Ecology and respect for creatures of the desert is evident in the relationship of the Indians to their environment in such quotes as, "They never say, 'This is my land to do with as I please,' but 'We share, we only share'." The Papagos share the feeling of being brothers with the scorpion, the hawk, and deer in a land where "Rain is a blessing counted drop by drop." And when the rain finally comes, plants, animals, and Papagos rejoice, asking, "Where else would desert people want to be?"

Suggestions for integrating the language arts springing from The Desert is Theirs during prewriting,

writing, and editing cycles are:

1. Read the book orally while showing the beautiful illustration by Peter Parnall. Ask children to listen for and jot down picturesque words which relate to the desert.

2. Encourage oral communication as children brainstorm and discuss words they have listed. Record the words on an overhead transparency, chart paper, or chalkboard. Categorize them under headings of describing words, action words, and naming words.

3. From the list of desert words guide the children in writing a cinquain. Drawing blank lines helps children to recognize the structure of the poem as illustrated:

Desert

_____ _____

_____ _____ _____

_____ _____ _____ _____

_____

4. After writing the title, "Desert" on the first line, ask children to choose two words describing the desert and record them on the second line. Encourage the children to choose words which paint pictures and which sound well together, for example, alliterative words such as "hot, harsh". The third line should express action, often ending in "ing". As children contribute a phrase which tells what the desert stands for, record it on the fourth line. The fifth line may be a synonym or a symbol for the title.

5. Lead in a choral reading of the poem in order to revise and edit it. Substitute better sounding or more descriptive words, rearrange word order, and check spelling and punctuation.

An example of a cinquain based on The Desert Is Theirs written by a language arts class following the above suggestion is:

Desert

Hot, harsh,

Thirsting, sharing, waiting.

Rain blessing dry earth,

Celebration!

Like the Desert is Theirs, We Walk in Sandy Places and When Clay Sings are Byrd Baylor books written in poetic style with beautifully illustrated scenes of the desert Southwest. We Walk in Sandy Places tells the stories of desert creatures who leave their tracks in the sand. Mary Schweitzer, an artist of the Southwest, has photographed tracks left by insects, birds, and animals in the sand. Showing the brown and white photographs, while reading the We Walk in Sandy Places a oud, might motivate children to photograph and write about the tracks they find in mud, rocks, snow, or sand. When Clay Sings recreates the lives of prehistoric Indians through broken fragments of pottery found in the desert. Children who pick up the broken pieces of pottery are told to treat them with respect, since every piece of clay is a piece of someone's life. Indians say, "The clay remembers the hands that made it. Does it remember

the cornfields too? And the summer rains? And the ceremonies that held life together?" When Clay Sings may inspire children to write about symbolic designs on Indian pottery, broken pottery pieces, a rusty horseshoe, an old patchwork quilt, or other relics of the past.

It Is Still That Way: Legends Told by Arizona Indian Children is a compilation of stories retold by children in reservation schools. Baylor asked children to tell their favorite story "perhaps the best story in the world " which had been told to them by someone in their tribe--.

After hearing these legends read aloud, students may interview senior citizens, asking them to share their favorite stories. Grandparents, great grand parents, uncles, aunts, and older friends can share oral histories which cause past happenings to be seen from a personal viewpoint. Tape recorded interviews and stories may be transcribed and edited by students to be shared as a class book or dittoed newspaper. The interviewing and writing activity described here is

similar to the more complex Foxfire Project in which high school students in Rabun Gap, Georgia, interviewed older citizens, which resulted in the publication of the nationally recognized Foxfire magazine.

After reading Coyote Cry or Hawk, I'm Your Brother children may experience changed feelings toward wild creatures such as coyotes and hawks. Both of these books by Baylor may become springboards for brainstorming, discussing, dramatizing, and writing about these feelings. Coyote Cry begins with Antonio and his grandfather, Southwest sheepherders, sitting beside their campfire, in the darkness listening to a distant coyote cry. Grandfather, wise in the ways of animals, observes that the coyote has a different cry this night. Antonio, however, hears only the cry of his enemy, a constant danger to the sheep. The sequence of events involving a collie pup and a female coyote causes Antonio to hear new songs in the coyote's cry and to say, "Maybe Coyote is not my enemy now."

Hawk, I'm Your Brother is the story of Rudy Soto who wants to fly so much that he captures a baby hawk from its nest thinking that if the hawk becomes his

brother he will be able to soar over the canyons like a bird. "But even a hawk too young to fly knows he's meant to fly. He knows he isn't meant to have a string tied to his leg. He knows he isn't meant to live in a cage." The hawk pulls against the string and beats his wings against the cage. Finally, Rudy, seeing how unhappy the hawk is, says, "One of us might as well fly," and turns him loose to soar over the Santos Mountain. Baylor implies that although Rudy's feet are still on the ground, he, too, flies symbolically as he and the hawk call back and forth to one another as brothers. Hawk, I'm Your Brother and Coyote Cry are good stories for discussing the feelings experienced by Pudy Soto and the hawk or by Antonio and the coyote. Both stories may become springboards for telling and writing of new stories based on the feelings of people and animals.

The following chart (Schmidt, 1983) might be used as a guide for story structure in retelling or writing stories.

| Somebody | Wanted | But | So |
|---|---|---|---|
| Rudy Soto | a hawk to be his brother so he could fly | he saw that the hawk was unhappy as a captive | Rudy turned him loose the on mountain and became brother of the hawk. |
| Antonio | to kill the coyote | he discovered that coyote was not all bad | he was no longer coyote's enemy. |

Integrated language arts approaches to writing springing from other books on the Southwest

Other authors of children's books on the Southwest which are appropriate springboards for integrating the language arts include Paul Goble, Joe Hayes, Joseph Krumgold, Miska Miles, and Betty Baker.

The Girl Who Loved Wild Horses, written and illustrated by Paul Goble, the Caldecott Award winning book for 1979, is the story of an Indian girl who understands and loves wild horses so much that she leaves her people to go live among the wild horses. When, at last, the girl is transformed into a beautiful mare, her people say, "Today we are still glad to remember that we

have relatives among the Horse People." The vivid, action-filled illustrations of the wild horses, Indians, and the storm should trigger many ideas for discussing and writing. The prewriting, writing, and revising procedures suggested as a follow-up to reading The Desert Is Theirs could also be used in teacher-guided composing sessions based on The Girl Who Loves Wild Horses.

The Day It Snowed Tortillas by Joe Hayes is a collection of folktales handed down by Hispanics in northern New Mexican villages. Although many of these tales probably originated in Spain three or four hundred years ago, they reflect the humor and customs of the people of New Mexico. Joe Hayes, author of The Day It Snowed Tortillas, is a professional storyteller who is well known throughout New Mexico. As children listen to the reading or telling of the stories of Joe Hayes, they, too, may be challenged to retell stories they have heard or to create their own tall tales.

And Now Miguel by Joseph Krumgold, the Newbery Award winning book for 1953, also has its setting in

northern New Mexico. Twelve year old Miguel's one great desire is to accompany the older sheepherders to summer pasture in the Sangre de Christo Mountains, but his parents tell him he is too young and irresponsible. Miguel's wish is finally realized, but with less satisfaction and greater responsibility than he had anticipated. Miguel is allowed to take his older brother's place as a sheperd when Gabriel is drafted into the Army. Miguel's overwhelming desire to go the Sangre de Christo Mountains might become a springboard for children's brainstorming about things they wanted very much to do, but were told they were not old enough to do.

Annie and the Old One by Miska Miles tells of a young Navaho girl's love for her grandmother. The Old One says that when the new rug is finished, she will die. Annie cannot accept losing the Old One and does everything she can think of to prevent the rug's completion. When the grandmother convinces her that she cannot hold back time, Annie picks up her weaving stick and begins to weave in acceptance of reality and her own responsibilities. As Annie changed her mind, children

hearing this story read could discuss and write about a time that they changed their minds about something important.

Conflict among the cultures of Indians, Mexicans, and white men is a reoccuring theme in Betty Baker's many myths, historical novels, and informational books on the Southwest. Settlers and Strangers, for example, is a history of the conquest of the Southwest and resulting problems as viewed by the Indians "whose lives and religions were shaped by the Southwest desert and by each other." Settlers and Strangers would be a good springboard for report writing using data charts such as illustrated below.

The above questions may become the basis for paragraph writing:

| References | What were conflicts between Indians and conquerors? | What good things did the strangers bring? | What problems did the strangers bring? | How can we solve the problem? |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Our social studies text says: | | | | |
| The Encyclopedia says: | | | | |
| Settlers and Strangers says: | | | | |
| The Newspaper says: | | | | |

Paragraph 1: Describe the Indians and their conflicts with the strangers.

Paragraph 2: Describe the ways in which the strangers improved the Southwest.

Paragraph 3: Describe the problems created by the coming of the strangers.

Paragraph 4: How migh these problems be solved?

Data charts, patterned after ideas by Dorothy Hennings (1982) and Gary McKenzie (1979) should be helpful to children in gathering and comparing information from various sources and organizing their findings into para-

graphs. Suggested procedures for an integrated language approach to a written report based on Settlers and Strangers with the aid of a data chart are:

1. Ask children to listen for and jot down problems introduced by the Spaniards and white men as the book is read aloud during several sessions.
2. Formulate questions related to these problems for brainstorming.
3. Have children record the questions at the top of the chart. Multiple references to be checked should be listed on the left side of the chart.
4. Have children consult references, recording information in the appropriate row and column.
5. Discuss their findings in teacher-guided discussions, comparing information from various sources.
6. Answer the four questions in small group writing teams. Using the data sheet information each group is assigned to compose a paragraph in answer to a question.
7. Record the four paragraphs on an overhead transparency for teacher-guided large group correction and revision.

Creative Springboards for Teaching Language Arts

The books and ideas used in this presentation demonstrate some possibilities for integrating the language arts through literature while developing an awareness and appreciation for the cultural heritage of the Southwest. Listening, reading, and discussing literature as prewriting activities can spark ideas and motivation for learning to write. However the best reason for using children's literature as a springboard to the language arts is the enjoyment shared as teachers and children are caught up in the message of a good book.

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